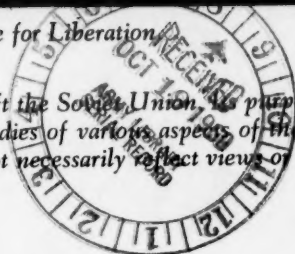


# SOVIET AFFAIRS ANALYSIS SERVICE

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## Outline of Reference Paper On:

### DAMAGING RESULTS OF THE SOVIET SCHOOL REFORM

The defects of the Soviet school reform, which came to light during the 1959/60 school year, are likely to cause an all-round drop in academic standards.

Snags in the proposed polytechnical training of the lower secondary grades and overemphasis of manual work in industry or agriculture of the upper grades have caused an educational gap in Soviet high schools.

As a result of the reform, many students have not coped with their academic curricula or have simply abandoned their studies. Attempts to build a system of polytechnical education and of vocational training have not met with success.

Most importantly, Soviet educators have admitted the failure of the provision of the school reform restricting admission to universities to such high school graduates who have done at least two years of work in the industry or agriculture. Too many of the "eligible" applicants flunked the entrance exams because of the long break in their studies. The failure of this provision has forced Soviet educators to backtrack on a basic principle of the school reform.

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## DAMAGING RESULTS OF THE SOVIET SCHOOL REFORM

The changes in the Soviet educational system ordered by Khrushchev two years ago to induce all school children to concentrate on polytechnical training and to do manual work in industry have caused a serious decline in academic standards throughout the country.

Khrushchev's school reform may be summed up as follows: the first seven years of secondary education--from ages 7 to 14-- are compulsory and must include a large amount of polytechnical training; after this period, all young people, without exception, should do manual work either in industry or in agriculture, and while at work pass through the second stage of their secondary schooling. In addition to evening schools for working and rural youth, 11-year schools--ages 7 to 18--are to provide trade training for those who, although still attending school, are at work in industry or agriculture. In the case of higher educational institutions, only pupils who have done at least two years of this kind of work are to be admitted.

The defects in the school reform which came to light during the 1959-1960 school year are likely to cause an all-round drop in academic standards. Several of these defects were brought up in speeches made at the All-Russian Teachers' Congress, held in the Kremlin in July 1960.

Khrushchev himself, for example, was forced to admit that young people were adopting a contemptuous attitude toward manual work, that there were tendencies among them to avoid work and to live at the expense of parents, that lack of principles and of ideals and cases of "nihilism" existed (Uchitelskaya Gazeta, Teachers' Gazette, September 22, 1960). Khrushchev also announced that a new, popular course entitled "fundamentals of political knowledge" would be introduced this year for senior grades in secondary schools. To explain this step, the President of the RSFSR Academy of Pedagogical Sciences, Ivan A. Kairov, stated:

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In order that young people leaving secondary school can more deeply understand Party policy and fight to put it into effect, and not simply resist hostile ideology but wage a campaign against it, they must be equipped with a concise and thorough body of knowledge in the form of a summary of all they have learned while at school and of what they will encounter in everyday life. (Uchitelskaya Gazeta, July 7, 1960).

The new study course will aggravate still further the excessive burden of work in the senior classes and make it harder for students to cope with the main part of the curriculum, forced as they already are to work and train for the industry. The result will be further decline in the educational level of secondary-school students.

The amount of compulsory training for industry is so great in the senior grades of some schools that insufficient time is left for the academic program. For example, a group of parents complained in Uchitelskaya Gazeta of September 20, 1960:

Our children are at secondary school No. 3 in Shebekinsk. Every year, as soon as they resume studies, they are dispatched to a collective farm to help with the potato or corn harvest for a month or sometimes longer.... In spring the same thing happens. Is it any wonder that many children are poorly-educated?

During recent months there have been more and more reports in the Soviet pedagogical press of young people throwing their studies overboard because they saw no purpose in carrying on academic work which offers no prospects under such difficult conditions and entails enormous sacrifice. It is not only the night school that is losing students. The press notes that all over the country many young people are leaving the eight-year schools which provide the first stage of secondary education. For example, Uchitelskaya Gazeta reported on September 13, 1960 that in the province of Kostroma, in the Volga region, 1,437 pupils in these schools left without good cause during the years 1959 and 1960. The same paper stated on September 20 that the losses from the first-stage secondary schools were becoming greater and greater, and cited as a typical example one timber industry enterprise in Arkhangel, which employs 600 young workers who left school at the age of 14. Over a hundred of the number are barely literate.

The paper commented: "It is too soon to be able to say for certain what the situation will be like in the new academic year, but judging from all indications it is not going to be very good. It seems to have become "an insoluble problem" to carry out the education law."

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The 1959-1960 academic year has also revealed snags in the introduction of polytechnical education and training for industry. Uchitelskaya Gazeta stated on September 17, 1960 that many school directors were quite satisfied if their schools were equipped with workshops where pupils could learn some trade. The paper stressed, however, that "...polytechnization does not just mean narrow specialization in a trade, but a thorough familiarization with the fundamentals of science, leading to an understanding of the technological processes of any kind of industry," Uchitelskaya Gazeta went on to point out that secondary schools failed to provide sufficient instruction in modern physics, so indispensable in a variety of jobs connected with automation and electronics.

The USSR Minister of Higher and Secondary Specialist Education, Vyacheslav P. Yelyutin, stated in Uchitelskaya Gazeta on July 30 that the country required highly-qualified specialists, but that the secondary schools were not turning out young people of an educational standard high enough to permit them to engage in advanced studies in higher educational institutions. In his interview with the editorial board of the Komsomol journal, Molodoi Kommunist (Young Communist), Yelyutin revealed the grave failure of the new reform with regard to higher education. In accordance with the provisions of the reform it was arranged that the overwhelming majority of the new entrants into institutions of higher learning should be taken straight from work in the industry, on special, certified recommendation from the employers. Only 20 per cent of vacancies were to be filled by open competition among those who had just left secondary schools. However, the academic qualifications of those who had been at work in industry or agriculture turned out to be insufficient as a result of the long break in their studies. As an example, the periodical Vestnik Vysshei Shkoly (University Herald, No. 7, 1960) cited the interesting case of the polytechnical institute in Tomsk, which received applications for admission from over 2000 young people who had worked two years or more. The Institute accepted only 400--the rest failed the entrance examinations. Yelyutin saw the problem as a dilemma:

We are deeply concerned over the gaps in the knowledge of young secondary-school drop-outs, especially of those leaving schools to work. Often entrants into institutions of higher education are incapable of answering elementary questions on physics and mathematics. We cannot reduce the scholastic standard of these institutions, yet we are anxious that the number of persons enrolled be as large as possible... (Molodoi Kommunist, No. 7, 1960).

Yelyutin then proceeded to repudiate the fundamental rule governing admittance to higher education laid down by the reform, namely, that all entrants should have done two years' work: "There is no need to make a two-year period of work the condition of entry into an institute..." (Ibid.).

Already the principle of admission to universities on the basis of academic ability and not of a work record in industry is receiving more and more support among Soviet educators, in defiance of all the stipulations in the education reform law. It is even recommended that institutions of higher education scout upper classes in secondary schools to spot gifted pupils for future selection:

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Students must be selected discriminately, and the way must be opened to the most proficient. Why should our teachers not start taking a close look at the students in senior grades? It is precisely in this age-group that adult abilities make themselves evident. It is the sacred duty of a teacher to do all he can to insure that gifted boys and girls are able to go to higher educational institutions. (Uchitelskaya Gazeta, September 27, 1960).

To sum up: the first year of the Soviet education reform caused many students to abandon their studies, made it much harder for them to master their academic curricula, and disrupted the attempt to build up a system of polytechnical education and of vocational training in general. The most important realization which emerged during the first year of the reform was that the rule to admit no one to higher education who hasn't two years of "manual labor" behind him is unrealistic and hampers the task of training specialists. It is for this reason that the Soviet leaders--without officially admitting their error-- have backtracked in their efforts to patch up the Soviet education system.

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